

BACK AGAIN!

The chill snows lingered, the spring was late,
It seemed a weariful while to wait
For warmth, and fragrance, and song, and
flowers,
And balmy airs and delicious showers.

But we bided our time, and with patient eyes
We watched the slow relenting skies,
Till at last one April morning we woke
To find we were free of the winter's yoke,

And a rush of wings through the rushing rain
Told us the birds were back again.
A joyous tumult we heard aloft—
Clear, rippling music and flutterings soft.

So light of heart and so light of wing,
All hope of summer, delight of spring,
They seemed to utter with voices sweet,
Upborne on their airy pinions fleet.

Dainty, delicate, lovely things!
Would that my thoughts, like you, had wings
To match your grace, your charm, your cheer,
Your fine, melodious atmosphere!

Precious and beautiful gifts of God,
Scattered through heaven and earth abroad!
Who, ungrateful, would do you wrong,
Check your flight and your golden song?

O friendly spirits! O sweet, sweet birds!
Would I could put my welcome in words
Fit for such singers as you to hear,
Sky-born minstrels and poets dear!

—Celia Thaxter, in *St. Nicholas* for April.

AN OLD MAID.

A lowering morning which made one wish for the sunny South or for Italy, for any place which would make one feel happier than could this dismal morning in Wisconsin. And then to think that this train could not make connection with the eastward bound train! It is hard enough to stop at such a miserable little junction at any time, but to spend three hours here this dark morning must prove the very refinement of torture. There are a dozen passengers who must wait and who prepare to make the best of their stay here. One couple, evidently just married, find the clouds of a rosy color, and they walk out of the smoky old depot to make a tour of the little town, talking eagerly the while. Two young fellows wander uneasily about, reading all the old tattered posters, glowing inducements to go West, and ancient time tables, which invariably decorate the stained walls of a country depot. These young fellows finally utter exclamations of impatience at the dreary monotony, and go across the street to the hotel, hoping to find something there more congenial to them. Two ladies at once take their departure for the hotel, and other people stroll out about the depot, and there are left two persons, a man and woman, who, after a little time, settle themselves to reading to pass away the weary moments. He reads his paper, she her book, and occasionally, woman like, she casts a look at her silent companion, wondering what loved ones are awaiting his arrival and whether he is impatient to greet them, or if he feel a man's stoicism in regard to it; wondering, too, how it is that each woman thinks the masculine lives connected with hers so full of manly graces and beauty, and who could find manly beauty in those rugged features? Then she turned her gentle eyes toward the window and looked out at the dreary landscape, looked with eyes which saw not outward objects, but were introspective solely. An old maid, commonly supposed to be the type of discontent and unrest; but here, evidently, the type failed, for this face expressed the utmost of content. Life had been filled with much of sorrow for her, all her bright plans had failed of fruition; one after another she had bidden good-by to them and had turned bravely again to face the coming of a new future, a future to be peopled again by her bright fancies—the old fancies all dead and gone from her except as they lingered in memory. An old maid she is, so far as years go, but no home is happier than her little ideal home. She has filled its rooms with bright little faces eagerly calling to mother and the dream-father is strong, earnest, helpful and loving. Her dream-home is happier far than many a fine lady's real home, although she has not pictured any grandeur about it. Oh, no, she dreams that the carpets are faded from much sunlight and worn from the tread of many little feet, that there is much planning to "make both ends meet," but she has imagined unselfishness living in this ideal home, and loving unselfishness can make all trials in regard to ways and means seem very slight indeed. Her companion in this depot is an elderly per-

son, a stout, large man, with keen eyes and a mouth at complete odds with the eyes, not belonging to them apparently. Often eyes do not harmonize in coloring with the rest of a face, but generally expressions are strongly akin. This man had a sensitive mouth, one with a mournful droop to it. Those who looked at him caught themselves wondering which would conquer—keen, hard eyes, or sensitive mouth. He read for some time, then gave a quick look at the thoughtful face near him, and said, abruptly: "Not a very pleasant arrangement, this."

A quick flush passed over the gentle face before him—a flush which his keen eyes noted instantly and understood—a flush which told of the girl's loneliness yet left to this lonely woman.

"Not that it matters much to me where I am," he continued. "Life can't give me anything harder than I've had."

"That is a bad thing to say," she said, in her timid way.

"A true thing, though," he responded, and the corners of his sensitive mouth drooped a little more. "I feel as if I had nothing left to live for. My wife died a year ago and—" here the voice broke. Distress ever calls some souls out from their reserve, and here was such a one, and she said quickly: "Ah, but you have all those vanished days and months and years to remember, all the loveliness of her life to think of now."

"How did you know her life was lovely," he queried, a little sharply. She hesitated a moment and then said, simply: "It must have been, or you would not miss her from your living so much," a tribute to the manly worth in the face she saw before her which was keenly relished by the owner of the face. He sighed and then looked for a time out of the smoky window, then said: "After all, life is a strange muddle," and, receiving a look of understanding in response to this sentiment, he went on:

"We don't know what is right to do, and yet we're punished by fixed laws if we don't do the right. That doesn't seem just to me."

"Oh, but it will come out straight in next life," she cried eagerly.

"I don't know whether it will or not," he responded. "I haven't seen the next life yet, and I don't know what it is like—don't even know if there will be a next life. I only know that we are hedged in and around in this life."

"But surely the next life will take away all the rough places of this," she said; "it will make us understand all that seems so strange about this and—there must be a future life; God surely would not put us into this life and let so much go out of it incomplete. That seems to me the strongest reason for a future, that so many die with their life work only just begun."

"Is that a reason or a hope with you?" he asked. She hesitated and did not answer, and just then one of the restless young men who had been a fellow-passenger of theirs came in and glanced casually at the two.

That glance made her self-conscious, and a blush dyed the delicate face and she turned, in a decided way, the pages of her book, as if she were determined not to let this stranger get possession of her wandering thoughts again. The young man passed out of the station, and the elderly one rose and walked restlessly about the room, knitting the shaggy brows occasionally at some troubled thought. The three hours passed, and 1 o'clock came, and a train came. "Can't I assist you?" he asked gently, reaching out a hand, brown hand for some of the numerous bundles she was carrying. She handed some to him and followed his sturdy footsteps to the train. They wondered a little why their fellow passengers of the morning were not in greater haste, but forgot them presently in the bustle of departure. He secured a pleasant seat for her and then one for himself at some distance from her. A few minutes of waiting, of idle watching of the dark landscape, so soon to be among remembered things, and the train moved slowly out of town, and as it moved away another train steamed in. She looked curiously at the second train, but remembered that this was a junction and did not obey her first nervous impulse, which was to go to her whilom protector and ask

him if he were sure they were on the right train. She forgot the train soon, and watched his stern, set face, and felt sorry for him, and wished he might feel as sure of the future as did she. Soon the conductor came, and she watched him as he made his way toward her. When he reached her protector, as she already called him in her inner consciousness, that individual gave a quick start at some words uttered by the conductor, after examination of his ticket. A troubled look settled upon the resolute face, and he conversed earnestly with the conductor a few moments, then glanced at her and rose and came to her. "I told you," said he, "that we don't know what is right and then we get punished by unalterable laws, and here is a speedy illustration of the fact, only that I feel now that I might have known the right, if I had taken pains to inquire. We are on the wrong train."

She looked deeply troubled, but said after a moment:

"How can we get back?"

"It is of no use to go back to that junction. We might as well go on to Chicago now and go from there; it will really take not much longer, and as you trusted to my leading in the first place, I will, if you will let me, see you safe out of this trouble."

"I am used to taking care of myself," she said, but her lips trembled a little.

"Where are you going?" he asked, and upon receiving his reply, added: "I am going beyond there, so it will be no trouble to me to see you safe. I will telegraph your dilemma to your friends at the next station; we shall reach Chicago in two hours, and the conductor tells me we can immediately take another train back, so that really the worst of it will be the extra four or five hours in the train."

He remained sitting with her, and chatted lightly for a time, till her mind was diverted from the unpleasantness of her situation. Gradually they wandered to deeper waters, and talked again, as they had earlier in the day, of the problems of life, and into those queries and answers of theirs crept, ever and anon, a bit of the personal history of each. He learned what a desolate life hers had seemed to be; he learned, too, what a sweet, cheery courage must underlie her whole being, that the desolateness should have been so ignored, and he grew ashamed of his own repining over a lot which had so much of brightness in it.

When the train drew into the great depot at Chicago he felt that he had learned to know a pure soul, and she felt a deep pity for the lonely life that opened to her view. And as they took the other train, which was to take them rapidly to their destination, each felt a regret that a few hours more would part them.

He sat silent for a long time after this, wondering if he dared to do the thing he wished. He was lonely, set adrift in the great world by the death of his wife, and he wanted a true, womanly heart to sympathize with his. Could he do better than to ask this lonely woman, who had no kith or kin in the world, to share his lot with him? Could she do better than take him, she who evidently had summer-land in her heart and could make a bit of brightness wherever she was? Each surely needed the other. He asked her if she knew anyone in his town, and finding she did know a person residing a few miles from him, he took his resolution quickly.

"I have a good farm out there," he said; "one hundred and sixty acres under fine improvement, house and outbuilding all in fine shape. You can find out all about me from Mr. —" A moment he hesitated as he saw that she did not realize what he meant; then he continued earnestly, looking down into the clear eyes lifted so fearlessly to his: "I feel as if I was looking into the eyes of my wife. Am I mistaken?" The last words were breathed rather than uttered, and then she understood, and the flame color mounted over the delicate features once more, and she said quietly: "Do I look so much like your wife?"

He was baffled, and for a moment knew not what to say, then rallied and said:

"She has gone into the future. I

don't know what or where that life may be, and I am lost and lonely without her. I want that which has gone out of my life, and I believe you can supply that want. You are alone in the world, and I can make your life pleasanter, I am sure."

It was a temptation, such as only homeless ones can understand; but, after a moment, she shook her head, and then, reading the questioning look in those keen gray eyes, she said, while the color deepened in her face:

"I loved once, and have loved ever since, and it would not be right for me to marry any one, feeling as I do."

The door opened, and the brakeman called out the name of the place where she was to stop, and the next moments were spent in gathering together her belongings. He helped her off the train, and grasped her hand heartily as he stood one instant there:

"I shall always remember you and your happy way of looking at life, and your faith will help me;" and then he swung on to the slowly moving train, and she walked away in the gloaming, a tear or two falling as she thought of the lonely days to come.—
Alura Collins, in The Current.

The Joys of Camel Riding.

A few days ago I had my first ride on a camel, and I thought it would be my last. It was to go to our camp that I got crossed-legged upon an Arab saddle, insecurely fastened by strings upon the back of a great, lumbering, hump-backed brute. I no sooner attempted to take my place on the saddle than the camel, which was lying prone, into which position he had been forced, began grunting like an old village pump violently worked. At the same time he turned his prehensile lips aside, grinning like a bull dog, and showed a grinning row of teeth, which he sought to close upon me. I got aboard without accident, and had not long to wait for a rise. The first movement, as he lifted his forelegs, nearly sent me over backward; the next, as he straightened his hind legs, still more nearly tipped me over his head. I had been warned to hold tight, but it was only the clutch of desperation that saved me. After several lunges and plunges, the brute got fairly on his legs. The reins consisted of a rope round his neck for steering, and a string fastened to a ring thrust in his nostrils, to pull up his head, and stop him when going too fast. My camel began to move forward, and thereupon I oscillated and see-sawed as if seized with sea-sickness or cramp in the stomach. Involuntary as the moment was, an hour of it would, I am sure, have made as abject a victim of me as the worst sufferer on the channel passage.

A heartless friend was in front of me on another camel, which he set trotting. Instantly I became as helpless as a child, for the camel disregarded the strain on his nostrils, and my fervent ejaculations. My profane, Arabic vocabulary was too limited to have the slightest effect. I swayed to and fro, was bumped up and down, until I was almost shaken to pieces. It would have been a positive relief could I have found myself at rest on the ground, but the motion was so incessant I had not time to make up my mind what course to adopt. It ended as even the experience of the worst kind must do, and I found myself still on the camel's back. Not so my humorous friend, who, to my great comfort performed a double somersault and did not succeed in landing quite on his feet. I was told that I would become accustomed to camel-riding, and might even get to like it. But my faith is not great enough for that.—
Dongola Letter in the London Telegraph.

Dust and Dust.

The minister, last Sunday morning, had preached a very long, parched sermon on the creation of man, and one little girl in the congregation was utterly worn out. After the services, she said to her mother:

"Mamma, were we all made of dust?"

"Certainly, my child."

"The preacher, too?"

"Of course. Why did you think he was not made like the rest of us?"

"Oh, because he is so awful dry, mamma, I don't see how the Creator could make him stick together."—
Merchant Traveler.